

Message Text

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PAGE 01 DAMASC 00141 151645Z

41

ACTION NEA-09

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TO SECSTATE WASHDC PRIORITY 2376

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AMEMBASSY CAIRO

AMCONSUL JERUSALEM

AMEMBASSY JIDDA

AMEMBASSY KUWAIT

AMEMBASSY MOSCOW

AMEMBASSY TEL AVIV

AMEMBASSY TRIPOLI

USIA WASHDC

USMISSION GENEVA

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BEIRUT PASS BAGHDAD

GENEVA FOR MEPC DEL

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TAGS: PFOR, XF, US, SY, SOPN

SUBJ: SYRIA MEDIA ATTACK "PARTIAL STEPS" AND U.S. PEACE
EFFORTS GENERALLY

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PAGE 02 DAMASC 00141 151645Z

1. SUMMARY: AFTER PERIOD OF RELATIVE CALM, SYRIA'S

CONTROLLED PRESS HAS AGAIN TURNED HEAT ON ISSUE OF PARTIAL SETTLEMENTS AND AMERICAN EFFORTS IN THAT DIRECTION. COVERAGE RESEMBLES THAT OF LAST MONTH'S ANGRY REACTION TO STATEMENTS BY ISRAELI LEADERSHIP BUT FOCUSES MORE DIRECTLY ON U.S., STATEMENT BY MINISTER INFORMATION WHO OFFICIALS CLOSE TO PRESIDENT ASAD GIVES UNUSUAL PUBLIC STAMP TO LEADERSHIP'S OPPOSITION TO FURTHER PARTIAL, UNILATERAL MIDEAST SETTLEMENTS.
END SUMMARY

2. AFTER EARLY DECEMBER'S BARRAGE DETAILING SYRIAN OPPOSITION TO PARTIAL SETTLEMENTS, DAMASCUS PRESS DIRECTED ITS ATTENTION FOR SEVERAL WEEKS AT OTHER TARGETS-- QUADRIpartite CONFERENCE AND OTHER PLO ACTIVITIES, U.S. THREATS AGAINST ARAB OIL INSTALLATIONS, AND ASAD'S VISIT TO LEBANON. HOWEVER, IN PAST FEW DAYS PRESS HAS RETURNED TO QUESTION OF ISRAELI AND U.S. MOTIVES IN PURSUING PARTIAL SETTLEMENTS, TALKING LINE THAT ISRAEL IS INTENTIONALLY ESCALATING SITUATION IN M.E. DURING ALLON VISIT TO WASHINGTON BECAUSE TENSION IN M.E. IMPROVES ITS CHANCES FOR OBTAINING NEW MILITARY ASSISTANCE. ARTICLES NOTE ALSO THAT ISRAEL CONTINUES TO PRESENT IDEAS FOR SEPARATE AND PARTIAL AGREEMENTS IN ORDER TO DIVIDE ARABS.

3. AL BAATH, JANUARY 13, ASSERTED "U.S. HAS NOT TAKEN ONE SERIOUS STEP TOWARD A PEACEFUL AND JUST SETTLEMENT." COLUMNIST ADDED THAT IF U.S. SERIOUSLY WANTED TO IMPROVE ITS RELATIONS WITH ARABS IT WOULD HAVE MADE SPECIFIC EFFORT TO PRESSURE ISRAEL OR, AT VERY MINIMUM, NOT GIVEN ISRAEL NEW SOPHISTICATED WEAPONRY.

4. MOST AUTHORITATIVE MEDIA STATEMENT TO DATE HAS BEEN MIN INFORMATION AHMAD ISKANDAR AHMAD'S EXCLUSIVE JAN 13 INTERVIEW WITH DAILY STAR (CARRIED IN FBIS). AHMAD, WHO HAS CLOSE RELATIONSHIP WITH PRESIDENT ASAD, CHARACTERIZED U.S. EFFORTS TOWARD PARTIAL SOLUTIONS AS AIMED AT DRIVING WEDGE BETWEEN SYRIA AND EGYPT. HE ALSO SAID, "WHEN U.S. OR ISRAEL HINTS AT PARTIAL SETTLEMENT, IT DOES NOT DO SO OUT OF LOVE FOR THIS OR THAT ARAB COUNTRY BUT OUT OF HATRED FOR EGYPT AND LIMITED OFFICIAL USE

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PAGE 03 DAMASC 00141 151645Z

SYRIA." IN FIRST PUBLIC SYRIAN REFERENCE WE HAVE SEEN TO SECRETARY'S TALKS HERE, AHMAD CLAIMED ASAD TOLD KISSINGER THAT SYRIA WOULD REGARD ANY ATTEMPT TO PARTITION ARAB POSITION AS HOSTILE MOVE AGAINST ALL ARABS. HE NOTED RABAT SUMMIT HAD UNANIMOUSLY DECIDED AGAINST UNILATERAL OR PARTIAL SOLUTIONS.

5. COMMENT: PRESIDENT ASAD HIMSELF HAS NEVER

PUBLICLY SAID HE WAS OPPOSED TO ADDITIONAL
DISENGAGEMENT STEPS AND HE HAD RECENT OPPORTUNITY TO DO SO
IN WIDELY REPORTED MID-DECEMBER INTERVIEW WITH INDIAN JOURNALIST.
HIS REMARKS THEN, IN COMPARISON TO THOSE REPORTED
ABOVE, SUGGEST PRESIDENT'S POSITION, AND CONSEQUENTLY
THAT OF SARG, IS NOT AS RIGID AS ONE MIGHT OTHERWISE
CONCLUDE. ON OTHER HAND, MININF'S PRESS INTERVIEW,
WHICH COULD NOT HAVE BEEN PUBLISHED WITHOUT PRESIDENT'S
APPROVAL, IS STEP UP IN SARG'S PUBLIC CAMPAIGN IN
OPPOSITION TO FURTHER PARTIAL STEPS. HIS INTERVIEW
UNDERLINES INCREASED FRUSTRATION AT HIGHEST LEVELS OF
SARG OVER SLOW PROGRESS OF MOVES TOWARD PEACE.
MURPHY

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